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February 28, 2019

TO: Supervisor Janice Hahn, Chair
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FROM: Rodrigo A. Castro-Silva
Interim Inspector General

SUBJECT: Los Angeles Times Article Regarding Youth-on-Staff Assaults at Probation
Juvenile Facilities

On Wednesday, February 27, 2019, the Los Angeles Times published an article entitled "More problems at L.A. County juvenile detention: A spike in assaults on guards" in which the reporter cited to Probation Department ("Department") data to support his conclusion that youth-on-staff assaults have increased significantly in the last few years. In particular, the article states that, based on data released by the Department under the California Public Records Act, "the rate of assaults on guards more than doubled between 2015 and 2018, though slowed slightly in the past year" and that at "both halls and camps, the assault rate per 100 juveniles rose by more than 120%." The reporter's analysis included an assertion that between 2015 and 2018, "the raw numbers of assaults on officers in juvenile camps jumped from 98 to 296," which, "taking into account the declining population of detainees, . . . translates into a rate increase of 254%." Further, the article noted that the "rate of assaults inside . . . juvenile camps climbed 59% from 2015 to 2018, according to county records."

As part of my office's supplemental report on updated data regarding use of force and OC-spray use at the halls and camps – as your Board on February 19, 2019, directed us to prepare for the Probation Reform & Implementation Team – we have had an opportunity to review the Department's data and data-collection methods related to use of force and OC-spray use on youth and to youth-on-staff assaults at the Department's facilities. Based on our review thus far, we have little to no confidence in the reliability of the Department's data on youth-on-staff assaults for the following reasons.

First, Department leadership has indicated that the Department has struggled to gather accurate assault-related information. For instance, in some of its review of force reports, the Department has found that its line-level staff were routinely inaccurately reporting youth-on-staff assaults. Indeed, in our February 4, 2019, report-back to your Board (at page 6), we noted that in several

incidents, “the use-of-force reports filed by staff described youth behaviors as aggressive or threatening, even when available video footage showed that youth appeared to pose no threat to staff.” Because not all use-of-force incidents are captured on video, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the Department’s use-of-force reports and subsequent data.

Second, how the Department gathers data related to youth-on-staff assaults raises concerns about the accuracy of the final data. In order to retrieve use-of-force information, staff at each juvenile hall and camp are required to review paper force reports, identify relevant data, and manually record it on an Excel spreadsheet. At times, this involves mining written summaries, leading staff to interpret and convert information into data. Because of resource constraints, the Department tasks a revolving set of available staff to carry out this process. Processes like this may lead to data integrity issues, as each step creates the possibility that data will be inaccurately transcribed or translated.

Third, the Department’s policies do not define what youth behavior constitutes assaultive behavior. Because staff have no guidance on what constitutes assaultive behavior by youth on staff, employees must use their own judgment and discretion in deciding whether an assaultive behavior took place and then reporting on that decision.

While our review is ongoing and still preliminary, the foregoing leads us to believe the data provided to the L.A. Times is unreliable, which calls into question the article’s conclusions.

c: Sachi A. Hamai
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